

Connections

LEPC

A Virginia Local Emergency Planning Committee Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2000

Tour tops Portsmouth hazmat team meeting itinerary



Tyrone Goodwyn, Portsmouth Production Supervisor, center, conducts a site tour for Larry Oliver and Gary DuBrueler, Frederick County Fire Department; Kevin Yost and Wayne Braithwaite, Winchester HazMat Team; and Scott Chandler and Jim Wilson, Eastern Shore HazMat Team.

*By John O'Neal, Battalion Chief
Portsmouth Dept. of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services*

In a shining example of public-private partnerships, the city of Portsmouth and BASF Corporation joined forces to host the state's regional hazmat team leaders for their 2000 annual meeting on March 28-29.

After an initial day of business meetings to benchmark response procedures and share lessons learned from recent incidents,

participants got an inside look at BASF's Portsmouth plant operations. Prior to the facility tour, Safety and Ecology Manager Michael Urbanek provided an overview of in-house emergency procedures, technical aspects of their products and production procedures, and their involvement in the community and the Local Emergency Planning Committee.

BASF Corporation ranks among the leading producers and marketers of chemicals and chemical-related materials in North America. Employing about 15,000 people at approximately 50 locations, the company is a supplier of basic, intermediate, specialty and fine chemicals; nylon fibers; colorants; dispersions; automotive coatings; plastics; crop protection products; pharmaceuticals and vitamins.

With about 150 employees, the Portsmouth plant produces acrylic-based super absorbent polymers, which absorb many times their weight in fluids. These fibers are primarily used in producing baby diapers, adult undergarments, feminine care products and for agricultural uses.

In addition to providing this program, BASF works closely with the Portsmouth Fire Department on planning for potential hazardous incidents at the plant, technical rescue issues and training for department staff. For more information, contact John O'Neal, Portsmouth Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services, at (757)393-8551. ♦



(Photos by Judy Johnson, Manager, BASF Human Resources & Community Affairs)

How Do You Eat An Elephant?

By Steve Grainer, Local Emergency Coordinator,
Goochland County and
James E. (Butch) Newsome, Chairman, Goochland LEPC

As the story goes, the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. That's the basic premise on which Goochland County's LEPC confronted the challenge of becoming more actively (and proactively) involved in community emergency planning and preparedness.

In 1998, the county's first hired Director of Fire & Rescue Services, Steve Grainer, assumed the duties of Local Emergency Coordinator, including responsibility for facilitating the LEPC. Rather than attacking every issue or concern simultaneously, Grainer suggested that Goochland's LEPC begin by establishing some emergency planning priorities while keeping in touch with broader areas of interest and concern.

The first challenge of digesting that big elephant was to identify the parts most edible and appetizing to the individuals expected to do the eating. Like most organizations, Goochland's LEPC is composed of individuals with diverse interests, concerns and skills. To invigorate this organization, it was important to identify and keep a finger on the "hot buttons" (interests and motives) that activate the members—both individually and collectively.

Then, Grainer began to seek others in the community who shared concerns about improving community emergency preparedness. Early in this process, James (Butch) Newsome from the Virginia Correctional Center for Women (VCCW) became an active player in promoting greater awareness and preparedness.

"As the Safety Specialist at work, I have the responsibility of doing the SARA Title III Report each year," says Newsome. "I sent copies of the reports to the County Administration as required, but I didn't know if anyone ever looked at them."

After the first few meetings, Newsome realized that, while his reports were reviewed and filed, the information was not being effectively circulated to organizations such as the fire and rescue companies that might respond to his facility. He undertook the challenge of simplifying SARA submittals and making them digestible and useful for emergency responders.

Through this effort, the LEPC began to successfully demonstrate that it could be a valuable and productive contributor in the county emergency planning and preparedness efforts. As the LEPC continued to seek a clearer direction, the group took its second major step by agreeing to become a semi-independent body and elected Newsome as their first chairman.

Scott Johnson, a retired naval officer with in-depth emergency planning experience and long-standing community ties, was elected vice-chairman. Robin Hillman, another lifelong county resident and emergency preparedness coordinator for NCCI, was elected recorder and will be the hub of the LEPC activities. Along the way, the Goochland LEPC has established several guidelines for conducting its business that may be beneficial to other localities:

1. Give members and prospective members a reason to attend the meeting. This can be *simpler* than it sounds. The notice for the first

meeting with Goochland's new LEPC coordinator in December 1998 included a public get-acquainted session prior to the meeting to enable Grainer to speak with the members one-on-one. Only six of approximately 20 attendees were LEPC members. Since then, six of the previous nonmembers have been recruited as members (including the chairman).

Each meeting is now preceded by a 30-minute informal opening period including some type of snack. This social opportunity frequently provides a natural segue into the dialog of the meeting that follows. The cost is generally less than \$20 for enough refreshments for 15 to 20 persons.

2. Eat what's on your plate. In other words, focus on the issues and concerns specific to your community. In Goochland, this focus is on planning for emergencies at facilities or locations that might occur in day-to-day commerce in the county and attract the greatest public concern. Though the release of an extremely hazardous substance would have significant ramifications for the community, the LEPC has come to realize that more public support is derived from planning for the types of events that most concern the citizens of the county.

As basic plans and contingencies are developed, the LEPC then develops strategies to expand those planning concepts to the "worst-case" events that might occur in the county. Some will say that planning should always encompass worst-case scenarios. However, the LEPC members generally feel that more can be accomplished by dealing with issues one bite at a time.

3. Follow the K.I.S.S. (Keep it Short and Slick) Principle. Experience has taught us that our greatest participation and productivity takes place in the first hour and a half of any meeting. Accordingly, the agenda for "official" meetings is arranged so that the session will end no later than two hours after it convenes. LEPC leadership recognizes that every member has a "life" outside of the organization and makes a serious effort to prevent these activities from dominating any member's focus—especially in the form of another required meeting.

The LEPC also maximizes efficiency by using small work committees and other groups (usually composed of members with similar interests or expertise) to work on separate tasks between LEPC meetings. In many instances, LEPC members also enlist the aid of nonmembers for specific tasks. Since 1999, the LEPC has employed this strategy to develop, conduct and evaluate an annual hazmat exercise. Rather than doing all of the work, LEPC members coordinate their involvement with county staff who actually produce the exercise scenario and conduct the exercise. This capitalizes on the county staff's knowledge of local government systems and procedures while ensuring the LEPC objectives are met.

Recently, Newsome expanded on this principle by asking the volunteer fire and rescue companies in the county to begin verifying information submitted in accordance with SARA requirements. As the Fire and Rescue Department is now the repository for required SARA information, the companies were a logical choice to conduct facility surveys (not official inspections) from which the information is verified. The additional benefit of

(continued on page 4)

Richmond Domestic Preparedness Chemical Weapon Exercise a Success



Donald Thommpson, Jr., Special Agent in Charge, Richmond Office, addresses federal agency representatives during exercise.

By George Roarty, Manager
Chemical Emergency Preparedness Branch

When more than 300 major regional stakeholders came together at the McGuire VA Medical Center on May 5 for a Domestic Preparedness Chemical Weapons Tabletop exercise, they took an important step toward identifying critical WMD response and recovery issues in the metropolitan Richmond area and opening a dialogue to addressing them.

Hosted by the city of Richmond, the exercise focused on coordination, decision making and integration of resources, and capability issues. Participants first gathered at the Hickory Hill Community Center for a four-day training program featuring modules such as *Responder-Awareness*, *Responder-Operations*, *Hazardous Materials Technician*, *Incident Command* and *EMS and Hospital Providers*.

Following the training, the players moved into the exercise portion of the event working in six functional groups [*Fire/Hazardous Materials*, *Law Enforcement*, *Medical (Hospitals and Emergency Medical Services)*, *Emergency Management*, *State and Federal*] to address response issues with the following objectives and results:

Objective 1. *Examine the adequacy of local, community-wide Emergency Operations Plans (EOP) for response to a terrorist incident involving chemical weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Identify shortfalls in capabilities and conflicts in planning.*



(Photos by Mike Reik, McGuire VA Medical Center)

The exercise underscored the importance of maintaining current plans and coordinating their development with stakeholders at all levels of government. All personnel must receive appropriate training to efficiently carry out their assigned responsibilities in the plan and have the necessary resources and capabilities for an effective response.

The event also identified the need for a separate annex to explain the modified WMD response structure that incorporates the crisis management component and associated issues such as crime scene preservation. It highlighted the need to strengthen communication protocols between fire, EMS, law enforcement and regional hospitals (particularly in the early stages of an event) as well as improving the capability to account for and track responders, volunteers and equipment throughout an event.

Participants also recognized the need for additional training for all response personnel to address the unique elements and issues of WMD events such as the response organization, the possible use of secondary devices, preservation of evidence, sample collection, etc.

Objective 2. *Examine the interface with state and federal agencies in the conduct of crisis- and consequence-management activities.*

The exercise stressed the importance of strengthening the local, state, federal interface to improve coordination during an event. Localities need a working knowledge of the state Terrorism Consequence Management Plan and early notification and the coordination of

resources and assistance will be critical. The FBI will establish the Joint Operations Center (JOC) as soon as a credible threat is determined to exist to facilitate the coordination and interface between all levels of government. Protective actions such as evacuation should be coordinated at all levels as well. To maximize federal reimbursement of all applicable costs, a system must also be in place to document all expenditures associated with the event.

Objective 3. *Assess the adequacy of local plans for the flow of public information and interface with/ use of media resources.*

The exercise demonstrated how the media can be an effective tool to keep the public informed about the status of the event as well as instruct them on what protective actions to take. To ensure the coordination of all information disseminated to the public, it is critical to establish the Joint Information Center (JIC) as soon as possible. Other strategies discussed for providing information to citizens included establishing 800 numbers to address public queries and requesting VDOT put up signs to assist in directing traffic around the impacted area. However, participants also recognized that localities would need to identify adequate personnel support to staff the telephones as part of the planning process.

Objective 4. *Examine various aspects of personnel, equipment and facility decontamination in the near-term, mid-term and long-term.*

The exercise identified the lack of adequate resources both in terms of personnel and equipment, particularly in regard to detection, decontamination and PPE.

Objective 5. *Determine the shortcomings in local medical capabilities to treat casualties of WMD agents. Identify means to obtain resources and assess the impact of delays on their receipt.*

A variety of issues associated with local medical capabilities emerged from this program. For example, most regional hospitals do not have an adequate decontamination capability in regards to

(continued on page 4)

ELEPHANT *(continued from page 2)*

this strategy has been to establish a stronger relationship between the facility operators and the people who will most likely respond in the event of an accident.

It will also help in refining priorities for more detailed planning in the coming year(s) as the company officers and personnel will be able to provide the LEPC with input based on their on-site surveys and dialogue with facility officials.

4. “If you’re waiting on funding, you’re backing up.” Although some LEPCs have been able to enlist funding and other support from private resources, Goochland has not had that good fortune. Therefore, the LEPC prepares an annual work plan in conjunction with the county Department of Fire & Rescue that includes elements that comply with HMEP grant program criteria. The LEPC works cooperatively with the Fire & Rescue Department to determine what plan improvements should receive the highest priority for each fiscal cycle and the cost of the efforts to make those improvements. For the past two years, this strategy has enabled the LEPC to quadruple its available funding

for important preparedness activities based on the current 80/20 funding formula for the HMEP Grant Program

5. Maintain a balanced diet. Goochland’s LEPC strives to balance the challenges of planning for hazmat emergencies with all other types of emergencies that can confront the county. Statistically, there is a stronger potential for a technological event such as a chemical spill (especially a transportation scenario) than for a natural disaster. The Goochland LEPC has determined that many functions associated with a chemical emergency would be similar, if not identical, to the functions employed for other emergencies. Therefore, the LEPC seeks to integrate its planning efforts for chemical emergencies with similar needs for broader emergency preparedness. This strategy has helped identify areas for improvement in other functional annexes of the county emergency operations plan.

“The county employees, volunteers and everyone on the LEPC are working hard to make this successful,” says Newsome. “We have representation from the fire department, county supervisors,

Department of Corrections (through the cooperation of Warden Hobbs at VCCW), the Sheriff’s Department and citizens of the county on the LEPC. I believe the LEPC is an important part of the county’s emergency planning.”

With its growing sense of teamwork and enthusiasm for a challenge, the Goochland LEPC feels that it can now begin turning that elephant into a banquet. Contact Steve Grainer at (804)556-5304 or email: sgrainer@goochland.va.us for more information.

The LEPC is particularly pleased to acknowledge the assistance of several individuals who made a significant difference in its direction, understanding and enthusiasm: Scott Gorton, CSX HazMat Manager for his assistance in putting rail hazards in perspective in 1998; Lynda Price, Chesterfield LEPC, for her assistance in showing how an LEPC can accomplish far more through its planning process than just hazardous materials contingency planning; and George Roarty, VDEM-CEP Branch Chief, for providing a wealth of information and referrals to help get the process underway. ♦

EXERCISE *(continued from page 2)*

casualties as well as fatalities. Hospital security, staffing, pharmaceutical supplies, patient tracking, communications links functions and Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) were topics of concern as well.

As these types of exercises are being conducted in many major metropolitan areas throughout the country, it is worth noting that this event drew the largest number of attendees from the hospital community (92) to participate thus far.

With players representing all levels of government, this training and exercise program will serve as a springboard for coordinating an effective and efficient regional response to and recovery from WMD events.

Capt. Alan Brooke contributed the exercise assessment information in support of this article. For more information, contact him at Richmond Department of Fire and Emergency Services, (804) 646-6660 or email: brookea@ci.richmond.va.us. ♦

LEPC Connections on the Web

LEPC Connections will be available in the near future on the revised Virginia Department of Emergency Management website: www.vdem.state.va.us.

In the meantime, for previous editions email George Roarty at: groarty@VDEM.state.va.us. ♦

LEPC Connections

Virginia Department of Emergency Management
Technological Hazards Division
10501 Trade Court
Richmond VA 23236-3713

This newsletter is a vehicle to help LEPCs exchange information and keep abreast of state and federal initiatives.

Tell us what you are doing. We will publish stories, initiatives, projects, studies, or issues that will be of interest to LEPCs and the Virginia hazardous materials response community.

Please submit your comments or recommendations to George Roarty by: fax: (804) 897-6576 or email: groarty@vdem.state.va.us.